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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the future of adult second language learning in Great Britain begins with an overview of the field's current state. It is argued that the large number of adults pursuing foreign language learning in a variety of institutions is not matched by quality of offerings, and attrition is high. A national testing program was developed in foreign languages for special purposes, but its use has not risen substantially in 20 years and more testing is done in English as a Second Language than in other second languages, despite impending formation of the European Community. The Open University has recently decided to begin second language instruction, contrary to previous policy. Research indicates a high level of interest among undergraduates, adult students, and business school students. The Open University's experience with distance education suggests the potential for success in this field. However, certain challenges are apparent: the limitations of independent learning within the university's diverse audience and the university's limitation in its ability to individualize distance language instruction. The institution must create its courses and materials to provide as many learning options as possible. It must also develop equivalencies for language credits to use in a national system of vocational qualifications. (MSE)

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CHALLENGES FOR THE 'NINETIES' IN ADULT LANGUAGE LEARNING IN GREAT BRITAIN

It seems to me entirely fitting as we enter the last decade of the 20th century that a critical review should be undertaken over the state of adult education provision. At a point of advanced development of communication technology and of teaching and learning methodology, such a scrutiny ought to reveal that we have an availability of resources for adults in continuing education that leaves no participant dissatisfied. We should surely be able to claim that there now exists a range of educational options which can accommodate the needs of every individual in his or her particular search for self-fulfilment, whether this relates to vocational need or to a personal wish to be better informed or skilled in some subject area.

I have no doubt that this statement or its parallel will be heard and re-echoed frequently during the week's many discussions at this AAACE Conference. As I understand it, the views and experiences of many dozens, probably hundreds, of experienced educators who will be contributing to the provision of adult learning opportunities in the 'nineties' will be shared here.

The choice of a provocative conference title like "ON TRIAL: THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS" leads me to expect however that by the end of the week we shall have heard at least as much disquiet expressed as satisfaction about the current state of this provision.

The challenge for 'nineties - where and what is the nature of the 'unfinished business'?

By then I shall know better than at present whether the balance of disquiet and satisfaction - and it may turn out to be assessed as a disturbing imbalance - reflects a parallel set of circumstances in North America as those which I recognize in Great Britain. If this is the case, I shall clearly be aligning my voice with those of my American colleagues in the utterance of a sombre and simplistic message such as: "Much has been achieved during this century in the cause of adult and continuing education - but very much still remains to be done."

I must condense my construction of this 'macro-concern' into a 'micro-exposition' - and I hope that this will furnish a small reinforcement among many others to the conclusion that we have no right to a sense of complacency about the current planning and provision of adult learning.

I shall focus my attention upon the national scenario in Britain in the 'nineteen-nineties' for adult languages-learning; and I shall try to illustrate both the logic and the strategies behind educational development in this field, and what many fellow-educators in my country perceive to be the deviances and misconstructions within the course of this development. If that suggests a wholly pessimistic outlook for the immediate future, I should quickly give my reassurance to this audience that the final stage of this regrettably cursory exposition will offer much more ground for hope than for discouragement.

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C. Hocking

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There is a disturbing irony in our national state of progress towards accelerated and more efficient languages learning when viewed from different perspectives and their related statistics. A quick review of certain of these perspectives will illustrate my point.

An impressive number of adult part-time learners in the UK follow courses in modern languages at a variety of state-financed institutions. In my own home county borough of Avon in the West of England (a population of some 750,000 people) the Adult Education Centres, publicly financed and spread in about 95 sites throughout the county, have on offer in this academic year (1990-91) a variety of classes of foreign language study. They will cater for 17 different languages (up to 5 levels in the case of the 2 most popular, French and German), and there are currently around 3500 learners enrolled in a total of 250 classes. There are, for example, around 95 classes in all studying French at some level, and 46 studying German. But the classes at 'beginner' or 'elementary' level - this implies all 1st year classes - outnumber those at 'intermediate' level or 2nd year by more than 2 in 1.

A copious
provision of
learner-opportunity
is not matched by
quality of offering

In other words a large majority of these students will either drop out of their beginner or first-year classes; or, if they stay the course till end of year, they will not proceed to a second-year or 'intermediate' class. It is clear then that what appears to be an encouraging illustration of motivated commitment to a learning undertaking has often achieved only a disappointing outcome. I have not come across any comprehensive enquiry findings which tell us precisely why these learners have not progressed well enough to give themselves sufficient confidence to proceed to a higher level. From quite extensive observation of such classes over some years, however, I have reached the firm conclusion that this is not a matter of original interest in the subject 'dying a natural death.' Evidence of the strength of motivation at the outset of learning would destroy that supposition. There is also very strong evidence, on the other hand, that the learning institutions which provide these classes - low-priced and widely available to the population at large as they undoubtedly are - cannot easily find well-trained class tutors to maintain the learning momentum of those activities. A much respected authority¹ on the national provision for part-time language-learning for adults refers to this deficiency in unequivocal terms:

"At present the recruitment of these teachers is haphazard. Their understanding of language learning and knowledge of teaching techniques appropriate to adults are often inappropriate, anticipated or non-existent."

This was in fact written 8 years ago - but I have no doubt that the writer would make the same observation today.

If we turn now to the field of 'LSP' or languages for special purposes, we encounter other anomalies. In 1964 the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry Examinations Board (then known as the LCCI Commercial Education Scheme) instituted a schedule of language tests, additional to its long-standing and traditionally-orientated written foreign language examination, which were entirely oral in content. This was a direct response to a spontaneous and urgent call from

leading industrial and commercial firms, particularly those of the industrial Midlands, for a type of language test which would assess just those skills which people in business most needed in their dealings with foreign counterparts. A market survey² commissioned later by the LCCI has showed clearly that these skills, for most firms, are related primarily to social interaction, based mainly within the framework of marketing, with variable requirements for the linguistic register of commerce.

Over a period of nearly 30 years this system of language tests has grown to accommodate business language needs in the UK in some foreign languages at 4 levels of proficiency. In order to match the requirements of business-based learners, often predictable only at short notice, considerable flexibility has been built into the LCCI/EB system, whereby:

The paradox of expressed need and 'lip response' to opportunity provided.

- a) they can be examined in approved premises on site, i.e. wherever their learning is taking place;
- b) only 1 month's notice is requested of a firm's candidate-entry;
- c) the testing-programme may be set up for an individual firm's needs at any time of the year.

Though this is basically a standardized-content test-programme, there is an increasing element of learner-centredness in the levels above 'preliminary' (level one): the examiner is directed, for appropriate test-tasks, to be aware of and orientate questions towards the candidate's own background and experiences. At advanced level (level 4), the candidate's most important test-task consists of an oral presentation, with freedom to use visual aids, of a self-chosen project, usually related to professional responsibility and experience.

'FLIC', or Foreign Language for Industry and Commerce, as this innovative testing scheme is known, was established appropriately enough after official reports from the Federation of British Industries in the 'fifties and early 'sixties had urged a major increase in the acquisition of foreign language skills for the world of work. It is the more paradoxical therefore that 2 topical sets of statistics regarding the take-up of F.L.I.C. since its launch in 1964 show that:

1. Enrolments for these tests across the UK reached 2,000 within 5 years - but the figure of entries for 1989, some 20 years on, had only risen marginally above this to around 2,400.
2. A counterpart to F.L.I.C., virtually identical in character, Spoken English for Industry and Commerce (SEFIC) was set up some 12 years after its predecessor to meet similar needs for English as a foreign language. Originally launched in France, it is now presented in exam centres in more than 15 countries in and beyond Europe, and has shown steadily increasing entry figures over its whole life. Enrolment figures for English as a foreign language are almost twice as high, in other words, as those for foreign languages among the British.

The pressures upon
us in Britain of
1992, the year of
"Europeanization"

This may well seem extraordinary when we consider that we in Britain are on the brink of the formation in 1992 of a simple European community, probably with a single European currency, which will have dispensed with trade barriers amongst members and have thereby released a free flow of investment and of labour interchange. The competition we face in commerce, from the viewpoint of European socio-economics alone, and the value for business employees of foreign language skills in this contest, could hardly be more qualified. It was in fact given particular emphasis (for what we might justifiably call 'the umpteenth time') in the preface by its Vice-Chairman, the Duke of Kent, to a major report³ in 1979 of the British Overseas Trade Board:

"Our industry and commerce is becoming increasingly interlocked with Western Europe and many other countries where inability to speak their language is a major disadvantage. A greater knowledge of languages is likely both to improve and widen employment prospects and job satisfaction."

The speaker here is extolling the assets of acquiring good practical language skills both for the nation's economy and for the self-fulfilment of the individual person. With 2 such motivational factors in our contemporary history, and in the face of what is far from being a totally committed response from within our population, the challenge for change and improvement is incontrovertible.

It would be entirely misleading not to affirm here that there are scores of instances of good languages-teaching practice, of inspired experimental work and challenging projects, to be found in British educational institutions. I should be happy to name and describe at least some of them, but time and space is a natural deterrent - as is also the invidious selection task of naming some, leaving out others, when so many deserve mention.

The position remains, however, as we have just seen illustrated in certain case-evidence, that there are still areas of serious deficiency in foreign languages education in Britain. And it is appropriate therefore to ask why its Open University, recently described after its first 20 years of life as "the biggest single innovation in education this century"⁴, has only just opted to create a role for itself in this discipline field.

The enrolment policy of the OU for its undergraduate and continuing education programmes - now numbering at least 40,000 new students each year - is one of true "openness". Anybody can apply to become a student (the minimum enrolment age for undergraduate students is 18) without consideration of past educational record; and virtually all places on first-year (foundation) courses are allocated on a 'first come, first served' basis. Its impressive range of study-packs covering many subject-areas may be bought, of course, by anybody and studied in circumstances entirely of the learner's choosing.

I recall, however, that when I joined the OU in 1970, coming into it from a background of languages-teaching to adult learners with special (commercial) needs, I was given to understand that the University had

no immediate plans to enter the field of languages education. There were 2 clear reasons, I was told, for this decision:

- a. There were already sufficient agencies offering language-learning opportunities to adults
- b. The problems of teaching languages at University level in a distance-learning institution were seen as (too) great.

At an interview panel for a job you badly want, you fight a little shy of entering into headlong argument. I should have liked to say then - and have found occasion to say frequently since - that, if these were the only reasons for the exclusion of languages from our general curriculum, they were misguided on the following grounds:

The Open University offers a track-record which qualifies it for a new role.

- 1. There is unmistakeable evidence to show that the language-study opportunities available to mature learners in the UK, though certainly prolific, are far from being totally effective;
- 2. Given the truth of the above statement, there is a strong case for the OU to tackle the problems of distance teaching of foreign languages and to establish a successful strategy for it.

These and parallel assertions have been uttered many times, and by the most experienced of British language educators. The Director of the Centre of Information for Language Teaching and Research, as first formal consultant to the OU on its adoption of a language programme, expressed the case⁵ thus:

"The language teaching profession has for many years wanted to see the introduction of modern languages in to the Open University..... so that knowledge and skills in a foreign language can find recognition in the framework of a national 'second chance' system. Their exclusion produces a major anomaly."

After some 8 years of debate (chiefly over resources), the die, as I explained earlier, has been cast. At this stage other protagonists and I have contained our sense of relief with difficulty; but it is no less hard for us to suppress feelings of deep frustration, even of shame, that we have allowed so long a period to elapse before beginning to find an answer to a glaring national educational need.

With the decision made, however, the challenge of building the right provision, of helping to fill the gaps in adult language-learning accessibility, has now to be tackled in earnest. We have to approach the problem as always with a critical review of strengths and weaknesses. The former need little emphasis - this at least is what most who have worked for or studied with the OU would say. Its 'open entry' policy, its well-tried learner support services and decentralized (in most respects) regional administration are impressive attributes for a new national educational initiative. Market research has also shown that there will be a very healthy take-up response for the University's potential language courses. A survey taken 2 years ago revealed a high degree of interest from a sample of existing OU undergraduate students, of students of the OU

Open Business School and of students in state-funded adult education centres:-

	<u>OU under- graduates</u>	<u>Adult Education Students</u>	<u>OU Open Business School Students</u>
Definitely/ probably interested	41%	61%	44%

An enrolment of several thousand students can therefore be expected for the first presentation of OU languages courses.

For innovations, moreover, like the modern languages initiative that we are considering here, the Open University has powerful collaboration partnerships to call upon. One of the strongest will be the British Broadcasting Corporation, which by itself has already established an impressive record in this field. The success of BBC language courses can be judged through the experience of a multi-media course, "Russian - Language and People", presented first in the early 'eighties: the course book went into reprint after publication for only one month, and early programmes in the course TV series reached an audience of 1.25 million.

National
Broadcasting has
for long provided
a vast array of
language-learning
opportunity.

We have already noted that Local Education Authorities provide an abundance of languages-study classes across Britain, and this is strongly complemented by a smaller but well-distributed network of classes organized by the Extra-Mural (Adult Education) Departments of most British Universities. A substantial amount of this overall provision is based, however, upon BBC materials. The British Broadcasting Corporation has for over 30 years offered a steadily increasing number of languages programmes by radio and supplemented these extensively in more recent years through TV presentations. Though its main concentration is upon the 4 main European languages, French, German, Spanish and Italian, other languages which have been given radio education coverage include Mandarin Chinese, Urdu, Greek and Arabic. The BBC and its language production staff have thereby acquired a high degree of experience and professional competence. There has been extensive liaison for many years with institutions in Further, Adult and Higher Education to provide a measure of class tutorial support. Nonetheless the BBC would certainly not claim to sustain within its own coordination a comprehensive tutorial delivery programme.

This is, on the other hand, the very type of student support service in which the Open University claims to have proven ability. It has been developed since the launch of the OU and its first courses in 1971, i.e. during the years of production partnership between these 2 agencies. One practical and economical option in the latter's languages course initiative would therefore be to develop new learning materials and support services around a core of film material of native speakers in authentic situations abroad, which doubtless already exists in abundance as unused footage from BBC programme filming.

From all of the above comments, the Open University will appear to be in a position - and, in view of the perceived urgencies of the 'nineties' that we have illustrated already, a crucial one - to add a powerful thrust to the cause of adult foreign languages learning in the United Kingdom. Its record of achievements in the years 1970-90 will ensure, as also noted earlier, that it will exercise a strong attraction in its new field of opportunity.

I am going to suggest, however, that to be successful in this venture it will need to innovate in a number of ways; and to do this we will have to examine critically and challenge parts of our existing pedagogy. The case for innovation per se is obvious: if there were no such case, why should the OU want to be involved at all, other to duplicate and produce, under its own imprimatur more of what is already on offer? Given the current struggle for resources to innovate in Higher Education on bases of true need, that would be no case at all.

Let me suggest evidence then for the need to be self-critical in designing our plan for modern languages education. This may be the more persuasive for the fact that much of it originates from published observations of Open University colleagues, past and present. There are 3 such sources of self-criticism which seem to me highly relevant. We talk very frequently in the OU of the 'independent learner' - as a description, for example, of our students once they have completed the study experience of their foundation year. This concept is challenged in an explanation of 'the negotiation of knowledge' in the Open University (Woolfe and Murgatroyd 1979)⁶ which claims that in the OU the term independent learner

"..... is meant to convey the image of the student working at his own pace, combining the various aspects of the teaching package relevant to his course in his own way and integrating the course material into his prior learning. In presenting this description of its students, the Open University is attempting to employ the same rhetoric as that employed by conventional universities. Yet students at the Open University receive highly structured programmed material in which both the order of reading and the time that should be taken are specified, and in which the pacing of work is determined by a schedule common to all students pursuing a particular course. Continuous assessment, with rigid cut-off dates for the submission of assignments, serves to reinforce the learning programme laid down by the University and further constrains the power of the student to negotiate his own learning. In many senses the term 'independent learner' can be seen as a mask for the University's lack of resources for face-to-face tuition beyond the foundation level."

This suggests that 'independent learning' has very marked limitations in pedagogical practices with OU studentship. The criticism of these colleagues is carried further:

"Groups of students are assumed to be homogenous. That is to say, individual differences between students pursuing a particular course are minimised and their similarities emphasised.

The OU has an array of proven assets - but will require to look afresh at aspects of methodology.

Differences in motivation and expectations are deliberately de-emphasised through a process of de-personalisation which arises from the fact that packaged knowledge is external to the student."

Other colleagues have similarly challenged the hidden agendas that may be associated with distance packaged learning. The deficiencies of standardization or 'collectivization' in this educational context are highlighted by Northedge⁷:

"Surely it would be easier to communicate in the direct language of personal intentions, rather than through an abstract and idealized model of 'the student'."

Northedge is in fact taking to task here the practice among his own colleagues in the University's Institute of Educational Technology of producing all courses with "dutifully listed objectives in a format very close to that proposed by the original behavioural objectives model." He sees this practice to be in opposition to the more desirable approach of "coaxing and negotiating with students in a flexible manner." With regard to tutorial support systems, he likewise proposes the greatest measure of learner-centred flexibility:

"If we wish students to become personally involved in their studies, I believe the teacher must personally see himself as a cultivator, a catalyst, a facilitator of learning events, not a definer of goals and a measurer of success."

Another researcher into the relationship between institutional direction and correspondence learners' study behaviour (Brookfield 1982)⁸ has pointed out that his sample group (of Open University undergraduate students) were unadventurous in their approach to learning:

"(They) exhibited an understandably heavy reliance on books, lesson units, and (course) broadcasts. This...was not based on personal choice, but was the result of institutional direction. (They) felt no sense of responsibility for locating and assessing relevant resources..."

In Brookfield's enquiry, his second and contrasted sample group are labelled by him "independent learners" - and he defines these as people undertaking "learning which is independent of external instructional direction and independent of institutional accreditation or recognition." These learners were seen from his observation to have

"set their own intermediate and terminal goals, evolved evaluative procedures, located and assessed relevant resources, all without the benefit of participation in externally planned programmes of instruction."

As I shall suggest later, the strong element of initiative exhibited in this mode of learning is exactly what we hope to see, and to help develop, in our foreign language students. Somehow the desirable features of this approach have to be transferred into the institutional setting, so that learning is achieved from the best practice of both worlds.

We should bear in mind that these critics have existing OU undergraduate courses as the focus of their concerns, i.e. their theme (in their own term) is the 'negotiation of knowledge' and the individuality of the learner. In its planned programme for modern languages, the University will combine language-as-communication skills (with considerable emphasis upon communication in the 'world of work') with ethnic background knowledge, such as issues in politics, economics and international relations, in business management, sciences and technology and so on.

It is just at this point of progress in our critical review of OU methodological efficiency that I want to separate for our purpose the latter foreground, or substance for learning, from the first-named, i.e. from the process of teaching practical skills in association with the understanding of underscoring analytical knowledge and grasp of rule-complexes. I do believe this poses new problems for us; for there are many language-educators in this country who see the learning of language fundamentally as a procedure in which the language-to-be-learned (and therefore 'to-be-taught') is to a great extent standardized, thus far more characterized by invariability than by individuality.

What grounds have we for believing, in contrast to the above, that language-skills for communicative language-usage (meaning in the main social and professional interaction with native users) can and should be taught and learned with an attention to 'individuality' - if preferred, to 'personality' - as possible? This question will obviously lead us into strategies of what is variously termed self-directed, self-managed or autonomous learning - or simply self-instruction.

It is common enough now for advocates to draw certain distinctions between these terms, but I am expressly avoiding such discussion here and will adopt a hybrid, namely "self-directed instruction", without using precious space to defend this particular choice. Suffice it to say that I find most appealing the concept of the learner having control of the direction, hence the progress, of instruction. It is seen by Dickinson⁹ to be

"...concerned with responsibility in learning. Individuals who are involved in self-instruction (as learners) have undertaken some additional responsibility for their own learning which in other circumstances would be held on their behalf by a teacher"

We should add to this sentence for total clarity:

".....or by a course author and his/her materials".

Where a learner is working, without a course-tutor, through a course-book or set of materials, the author(s) will have traditionally assumed the roles of 'course-guide' and 'progress-manager.'

One obviously does not have to look far in this country for statements of sincere gut-belief, on the one hand, and amply-arrayed evidence, on the other, in support of self-managed learning. To quote Knowles¹⁰ in

this context is almost inevitable, and the case is the more potent for the simple directness of the message through which it is here expressed:

"I acknowledge that there are situations in which teaching, instruction, and even indoctrination are called for - but I also think that every act of teaching should have built into it some provision for helping the learner become more self-directing. I recognize that there are situations in which a person is dependent in some respects, and that in these situations it is appropriate for him or her to be taught or directed. But I don't think that it is healthy or even humane for a person to be kept permanently dependent upon a system or upon another person."

Self-directed
instruction must be
seen to have
relevance in all
subject-areas:
its role in
languages learning
is awaiting fuller
development.

The same belief in the proven ability of the adult person to exercise sound judgements in important aspects of his or her learning was strongly voiced by many adult educators such as Newton¹¹ who emphasized the important factors of 'readiness' in the learning process:

"The adult's readiness for learning is inherent in his societal role as a worker, parent, spouse, organizational member, and the like. Since need is basic to working and readiness, the requirements and demands of the adult's present situation and aspiring roles in real life must dominate and supersede all other considerations in andragogy."

Newton was not writing here of any particular subject-field such as foreign languages, but there is an easily graspable relevance in the statement:

"Theoretical information is accordingly used only to clarify and enrich the adult's needs-oriented studies".

The parallel for languages-learning can be shown as the critical relationship between 'learning about language' i.e. the rules and codes of practice of a standard and non-individualized version of the language, and the framework of personalised learner-needs in the context of language usage for the learner's own particularized environment.

The case for learner-centred languages education has probably been expressed as cogently as anywhere through the extensive work during the 'seventies' of the Council of Europe Modern Languages Project. The Council of Europe, an intergovernmental organization with its headquarters at Strasbourg in Eastern France, operates in the educational and cultural spheres through its Council for Cultural Cooperation. In 1971 a Group of Experts was formed representing several member-countries to investigate the feasibility of a "unit-credit scheme" for adult learners of modern languages which would be espoused and accreditable throughout those countries and beyond:

"The unit-credit concept was itself developed as a way of breaking down large global subjects, areas of knowledge or 'disciplines', which all learners are expected to study following a set path in the same way, into far smaller, relatively independent units which can be combined and sequenced in different ways according to the

needs, motivations, characteristics and resources of different learners. 'Learner-centredness' means a profound change of emphasis and attitude for the teacher..... fostering the learner's growth in awareness, proficiency and confidence towards the day when self-reliance can take over from teacher-reliance."¹²

As I suggested in an earlier reference (page 8) we have to extend this illustration in the context of the Open University from 'teacher' to 'course authorship' - and hence, in the terms of the above quotation, to speak of self-reliance taking over from 'course-reliance'.

Within the array of papers published for the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Project there are inevitably strong advocates of the primacy, in the planning of teaching/learning programmes, of adult language learning needs,¹³ of learner-autonomy¹⁴ and of self-assessment.¹⁵

To date we have reviewed, albeit cursorily, the broad national need in Great Britain for foreign languages proficiency, the relative failure, at least on certain counts, for employers, learning institutions and individuals to fully meet this need - and the responsibility which the Open University, seen against its background of strengths and weaknesses, can be said to hold for helping to resolve that problematic situation.

To achieve that aim, I believe it must design its materials, offer schemes for learning and support for those schemes, which will take seriously into account the variety of learners' motivations and needs and learning styles. It must create its courses and materials to provide as many options as possible for learning routes.

They will take into consideration the increasingly rich source of materials for promotion of individual learning, i.e. for personal exploration and practice, that are available to us through all the media - and especially so with the lowering of national barriers across Europe in 1992.

Perhaps more urgent than anything will be the need to bring into extended and specialized modes of usage its tuition and counselling service. We have looked in the abstract at aspects of a new tutorial role supporting the ventures of the learner in the mode of self-guided instruction. Labels in education can be needlessly ambiguous, but I am mindful particularly of the vital role of the counsellor as learning advisor, exploring with the learner his or her previous experiences in language learning, attitudes associated with them, recognizable strengths and weaknesses, short and longer-term needs. From this must follow sound and broad-ranging guidance for identifying the right materials and opportunities for self-directed learning and practice, and for developing strategies for putting these to best use, e.g. in support of 'core' course materials. It should be possible to offer diagnostic materials for testing and developing the individual's ability, proven and potential, to be an autonomous learner. Guidelines for maximizing self-directed learning groups - which means, for instance, pooling the proficiency each member has, or will be developing, within the range of skills just referred to, hence within the scope indeed of being a "learning opportunist".

The task of the OU: an expansion of modes of distance-teaching to accommodate greater self-direction in learning.

The end product will be the antithesis, we sincerely hope, of what has been described in a recent report¹⁶ on the state of language proficiency of 1st year entrants to departments of French in a large sample of British universities, polytechnics and institutes of higher education: the general appraisal of the majority of these students was that they were

- expecting to be taught rather than to learn
- reluctant to take an active part in learning
- incapable of independent work
- afraid of making mistakes, tending to remain silent in discussion
- afraid to ask for help.

As a final element of this exposition of case material showing how adult education in Britain is indeed facing trials and challenges, I want to draw, from the field of educational assessment, a recently-launched national system of credit accumulation leading to vocational qualifications. A long-standing concern for the revision and rationalization of such qualifications has led to the establishment of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications: the "N.V.Q." framework will cover all occupations and significant areas of employment, and their main features are that they are 'competence-based' and 'employment led'. There will be a means known as the National Record of Vocational Achievement (NROVA) by which an individual can accumulate 'unit-credits' towards qualifications with such learner-focussed features of flexibility as

- choice from different national awarding bodies
- accessibility to different modes of learning
- availability in different locations and over varying periods of time.

This development is seeking to establish a rapprochement between business and non-business sectors, together with a harmonization of the bridgeable needs of both education and training. The vision of outcome has been expressed as 'a seamless garment called facilitation of learning' which dispenses with the obsolete and dysfunctional divide between those 2 goals.

Areas of competence will be assessed through 5 levels, and will be identifiable and definable from the simplest skilled tasks within a professional environment to those of the highest level of leadership and management responsibility.

The challenging task ahead within this initiative is to develop suitable NVQs, both elaborated for professional language uses such as translators, interpreters and bilingual secretaries, and for non-professional users whose language needs are those referred to earlier, i.e. as an adjunct to their primary professional skills.

* * * * *

A new venture in task-related assessment: its relevance with language skills.

In the preceding pages I have tried to illustrate how foreign languages learning among adults in Britain does not in many respects reach the levels of proficiency that have for long been achieved by other countries - for example, by many of our Continental neighbours.

I have suggested 2 agencies who should be able, in their respective approaches to teaching and assessment, to help bring about a major improvement.

They will genuinely be 'on trial', therefore, in the next decade in the pursuit of this goal. We have high expectations of them both.

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Cardiff, October 1990

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